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**THE
RELIGION OF THE BRAHMO SAMAJ.**

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HEM CHANDRA SARKAR, M. A; D. D.

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PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

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In the course of my missionary tours in Southern India I have been constantly asked for a book in which the position and principles of the Brahmo Samaj could be found and I had to admit that we had no such book in English. It is a matter of sincere regret that our leaders in the past did not compile a book of this nature. We must still wait for a 'master hand' for adequately and worthily fulfilling this longfelt want. The demand, however, is so persistent and legitimate and presses so keenly on one who has to meet hundreds of new inquirers, that I have been compelled, much against my own wishes and inclinations, to write out the following pages somewhat hurriedly as a temporary and tentative substitute. I would have much preferred that some one more competent had undertaken the work. Indeed, it was in that hope that I waited long. My apology, besides, the pressing demand for such a book is in the consciousness that in the free and progressive atmosphere of Brahmo thought, there is no apprehension of any statement of mine being mistaken for an authoritative, complete or final exposition of the Brahmo creed. A great assurance to myself, and I am confident it will be so to many others, is that Pandit Sivanath Sastri went through the entire manuscript. I am also indebted to Mr. V. Ramkrishna Rao who very kindly corrected the proofs with great care.

CALCUTTA,

HEM CHANDRA SARKAR.

20th Dec., 1906.

सुविशालमिदं विश्वम् पवित्रं ब्रह्ममन्दिरं
चेतः सुनिर्मलं तीर्थं सत्यं शास्त्रमनश्चरं
विश्वासो धर्ममूलं हि प्रीतिः परमसाधनं
स्वार्थनाशस्तु वैराग्यं ब्राह्मैरेव प्रकीर्तते ।

This wide universe is the sacred temple of God
Pure mind the place of pilgrimage, Truth the Scripture Eternal
Faith the fountain of religion, love its supreme sacrament,
And self-sacrifice the true asceticism, so say the Brahmos.

THE RELIGION OF THE BRAHMO SAMAJ.



CHAPTER I.

A Historical Sketch of the Brahmo Samaj.



From the earliest times the history of Hinduism has been marked by repeated endeavours at reform. Almost at every epoch there has been some effort to purge and purify the current religion and to establish in its place the spiritual worship of the One True God. From the times of the *Rishis* of the Upanishads there has scarcely been a generation but, in some part of India or other, some nobly inspired soul has raised his protest against the idolatry, unspirituality and ceremonialism of the popular religion. Gautama Buddha, Nanak, Kabir, Tukaram, Sri-Chaitanya are only a few of the more prominent and successful spirits amongst a host of religious reformers in the long, mostly unwritten annals of Hinduism. The Brahmo Samaj is the latest attempt at religious reform in Modern India, and Rajah Ram Mohun Roy a direct lineal descendant of the *Rishis* and saints of Hindusthan.

Reform
movemen
in Hindu

A unique
epoch in
Indian
History.

Modern India represents an epoch of great interest and importance. In the history of India it has a unique significance; never before did the country pass through such a momentous change in all spheres of national life. The political, social, industrial structure of the nation is undergoing a radical transformation. Nay, we may say that in Modern India is being enacted a momentous drama of world-wide interest. Now and here, for the first time in the history of the world, the Eastern and Western civilisations, like two mighty rivers after a long parallel march, have at last met together at the feet of the Himalayas to give birth to a truer, fuller, and completer civilisation for future humanity; and Brahmoism is the religion of that future humanity born of the union of the East and the West. To its founder, Rajah Ram Mohun Roy, was vouchsafed the sublime ideal of a universal religion which knew no barriers of caste; colour, race or nationality but united men and women of all classes and countries in the spiritual worship of the One Eternal God, the Creator and Father of all.

Brahmoism
the Religion
of Future
Humanity.

Ram Mohun
the Prophet
of the World-
Religion.

Ram Mohun Roy was eminently fitted, as though by a special ordination of God, to be the prophet of this world-religion, in that he combined and harmonised in himself the spiritual culture of all the great existing religions. Born and brought up in an orthodox Hindu family and possessed of a thorough and intimate knowledge of the profound spiritual culture and vast religious literature of Hinduism, the Rajah early in his life came into

close contact with Islam and made an earnest study of its literature. Later in his career, he made a strenuous and searching study of Christianity, having learnt Greek and Hebrew in order to be able to study the Bible in the original. He had also opportunities of being acquainted with Buddhism in close quarters, having spent some time in Tibet in search of religious truth in early manhood when turned out of home by his father on account of his bold religious speculations. After a varied and eventful career, in the course of which he travelled far and wide even beyond the borders of India to the then unknown Tibet, learnt sixteen languages and studied the Hindu, Mahommedan, Jewish and Christian Scriptures in original, he at length settled down in Calcutta in 1814, at the age of forty, with the object of propagating his religion among his countrymen and the world at large. To this task he consecrated all his resources, time, power and energy.

His close acquaintance with Hindu, Buddhist, Mahommedan and Christian cultures.

For fourteen years he laboured on his mission, delivering his message in earnest conversation to the circle of friends who clustered round him and through written discourses to the wider public. The generality of Hindus and Christians failed to understand him and attacked him vehemently. Rajah Ram Mohun Roy tried to silence both by the authority of their own respective scriptures. To the Hindu opponent he showed that the most ancient and authoritative scriptures of Hinduism enjoined the worship of One Eternal God who is without form or shape; to the Christian he

Ram Mohun's Message and Method.

proved that the religion of Jesus was the pure universal Theism of the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man. Single-handed and under very trying circumstances, he fought against the assaults of bigoted Hindus and orthodox Christians to establish the universal religion of 'One God, one humanity', till at length on the 22nd August, 1828, he succeeded in organising a weekly meeting for the worship of God irrespective of caste and creed in a hired house in the northern part of Calcutta. Two years later, with the help of some friends, he erected a modest building for the Theistic Church or the Brahmo Samaj, as it came to be called, in a central part of Calcutta; and this still exists and is known as the Adi Brahmo Samaj.

Foundation
of the
Brahmo
Samaj.

The first
Congrega-
tion.

Here, week after week, a motley gathering used to meet for the worship of the One God without regard to caste, creed or colour. The worship consisted in reciting verses from the Upanishads and singing hymns and reading religious discourses written by Ram Mohun Roy. Prior to this public service, portions of the Vedas used to be read by Brahmins in a back-room to which only Brahmins were admitted.

Ram
Mohun's
Visit to
England and
Death.

In August 1830, Rajah Ram Mohun Roy embarked for England, leaving the infant church in the care of Ram Chandra Vidyabagish. And there he died on 27th September, 1833. In the meanwhile, the Brahmo Somaj in Calcutta gradually languished; most of its members, who had been drawn to it mainly through the influence

of Rajah Ram Mohun Roy, ceased to take any interest in it after his departure for England. Only the faithful Ram Chandra Vidyabagish remained steadfast; and for seven years he regularly and punctually conducted the weekly service, as directed by Rajah Ram Mohun Roy, often alone like the solitary watcher by the dim-burning pyre at the burning-ghat. At length, help came from an unexpected quarter. In the year 1838, Devendra Nath Tagore, the eldest son of Dwarka Nath Tagore, a friend and fellow-worker of Rajah Ram Mohun Roy, began to take interest in the Brahmo Samaj. As a boy, Devendra Nath had often seen Rajah Ram Mohun Roy and had been, in fact, a pet of his. It is said the Rajah foresaw that the young boy would grow to carry on his own life-work. But for many years, there was no sign of any religious tendency or interest in Devendra Nath. His early youth was like that of any other scion of wealthy families. In the year 1838, however, while attending on his grand-mother in her last moments at the burning-ghat, a strange feeling came over him: he experienced an indescribable joy in the felt presence of God. The pleasures and riches of the world appeared trivial to him. From that time a great change came over his life. He spent many days in meditation and felt that the idols they worshipped were not God, that God was one and could not be perceived by the senses. Then the memory of Rajah Ram Mohun Roy came back to him; he inquired about his

Ministry of
Ram
Chandra
Vidyabagish.

Conversion
of Devendra
Nath Tagore.

The Tatwabodhini Sabha.

Brahmo Samaj and sent for its Minister, Ram Chandra Vidyabagish. Devendra Nath began to read Upanishads under Ram Chandra Vidyabagish and established a society, Tattwabodhini Sabha, for the study and diffusion of the ancient Theistic literature of India.

The institution, which was at first composed of the brothers and cousins of Devendra Nath, began to expand rapidly. Ram Chandra Vidyabagish was appointed its minister; its anniversary was celebrated with great *eclat* in 1840. The Brahmo Samaj at this time was at the lowest ebb of its life. Fortunately, the Tattwabodhini Sabha came to its rescue at this juncture. The members resolved to take charge of it; the separate monthly service of the Tattwabodhini Sabha was discontinued, and they began to attend the services of the Brahmo Samaj. Through their youthful energy and enthusiasm the Brahmo Samaj soon revived; and a period of great and growing activity followed. The faithful old Minister of the Brahmo Samaj, Pandit Ram Chandra Vidyabagish, had at last the satisfaction of seeing his devotion rewarded. But for his loyal perseverance, the sapling planted by Rajah Ram Mohun Roy might have perished in the dark days following the death of the founder.

Rapid progress of the Brahmo Samaj under the fostering care of Devendra Nath.

The Brahmo Samaj now passed into the safe keeping of Devendra Nath. Drawn by his influence, many young men joined the Samaj. His active mind devised many new measures for the development of the Samaj. In 1842 the

Tattwabodhini Patrika was founded as the organ of the Brahmo Samaj, which exercised a very powerful influence over the rising generation of Bengal. The Brahmo Samaj, up to the time when Maharshi Devendra Nath Tagore joined it, was nothing but a motley congregation which occasionally met together in a half-serious, half-comical mood for listening to hymns, recitations from the Sanskrit Scriptures and religious discourses. There was neither any definite aim nor any settled conviction. The noble provision of the Trust Deed about the equal rights of all without regard to caste, creed or nationality was openly violated by disallowing the presence of non-Brahmins at the reading of the Vedas; doctrines about idolatry and incarnation were often preached from the pulpit. No sooner had Maharshi Devendra Nath joined the Brahmo Samaj than he turned his attention to rectifying these irregularities.

Under his influence and inspiration, it soon developed into a purely theistic congregation. He found that those who came to the service of the Brahmo Samaj were not inspired and animated by one common conviction. In their individual lives and at their homes, they were idolaters as much as the ordinary Hindus. In order to make the Brahmo Samaj a body of men believing in the One True God and worshipping Him in truth and spirit only, Devendra Nath drew up a Brahmo covenant containing a number of vows enjoining the renunciation of idolatry, the

Institution of
a Brahmo
Covenant
and
Initiation.

worship of the One Only God as described in the Vedanta and the practice of virtue. Devendra Nath himself took the lead in being initiated into Brahmoism by Ram Chandra Vidyabagish by signing this Covenant in Dec. 1843. Twenty of his friends followed him in this new and momentous departure. Thus was formed the nucleus of a Brahmo community; and by 1847 the number of covenanted Brahmos rose to 767.

Nucleus of a
Brahmo
community.

Infallibility
of the Vedas
Discarded.

Up to this time, Brahmoism was tacitly understood to be based on the Upanishads. In his religious controversies, Rajah Ram Mohun Roy used to refute the arguments of his Hindu opponents by citing passages from the Upanishads in support of his views, as, in his controversies with Christian opponents, he would refute theirs by the authority of the Bible. In order to show to his countrymen that all Hindu scriptures were not idolatrous, he published some of the Upanishads in original Sanskrit and also translated them into English and Bengali. His followers took it to mean that he based Brahmoism on the Upanishads. The religion of the Brahmo Samaj at the beginning was known to be Vedantism. The doctrine of the infallibility of the Vedas was tacitly accepted by the Brahmo Samaj. It found a stimulus in the ill-feeling against the Christian missionaries which was at that time raging strong on account of the conversion of a Hindu lad of a respectable family into Christianity. Though the genesis of Devendra Nath's own faith in Brahmoism was

independent of the Upanishads, he had a great reverence and predilection for them and was rather disposed to accept them as the basis of Brahmoism, rejecting all other Hindu scriptures including the Samhitas. But by this time a younger generation had grown up who were not ready to accept even the Upanishads as infallible. The controversy went on in the Brahmo Samaj for several years. Maharshi Devendra Nath had the question carefully considered. He sent four students to Benares to study the four Vedas. He himself went to Benares to discuss the question with reputed Vedic teachers. At last to his great regret, he found that the doctrine of the infallibility of the Vedas or of the Upanishads was untenable and, much against his natural inclination, he gave it up in 1848; thus the early Vedantic Unitarianism came to be superseded by natural Universal Theism. Soon after, he compiled a book called the Brahmo Dharma, a collection of theistic passages from the Upanishads dictated by him from memory and taken down by Babu Akshaya Kumar Dutt, the whole work being finished in two hours.

Compilation
of Brahmo
Dharma.

All these changes were formally announced during the anniversary festival of 1850, which was now being celebrated on the 11th of Magh, the day on which the Prayer Hall at the Chitpore Road had been consecrated. The reconstructed Samaj entered upon a career of great propagandistic activity. Maharshi Devendra Nath visited different parts of the country and estab-

Missionary
Activities of
Devendra
Nath.

lished many new Samajes in mofussil towns. He also trained up a small band of preachers who carried the message of Brahmoism throughout Bengal. For several years the work went on with unabated enthusiasm. In 1857 Maharshi Devendra Nath retired to the Himalayan regions near Simla to spend his days in study, meditation and communion. He had no desire to return to the bustle and tumult of society. But at the end of a year and a half, one day he felt a distinct call to go down and work among his countrymen, however unpleasant the task might be. Sorely against his will he came back to Calcutta. The result was a period of unusual activity and enthusiasm in the Brahmo Samaj. The sermons he used to deliver at this time from the pulpit of the Brahmo Somaj kindled a new fire among the younger generation. Already during the absence of Maharshi Devendra Nath, Babu Keshub Chandra Sen had joined the Brahmo Samaj. The two kinder souls soon recognised each other. Keshub looked upon Maharshi with unbounded regard and love, and Maharshi rejoiced at the accession of this gifted young man from a respectable family and treated him with fatherly affection and solicitude. For a time they worked together in perfect harmony, and their combined influence created a new life among the younger generation of Calcutta and Bengal. Hundreds of young men joined the Samaj. The younger party threw themselves heart and soul into the work of propagation. They went about to all parts of the

Association
of Keshub
Chandra Sen
with
Maharshi
Devendra
Nath.

country preaching the new faith, establishing new Samajes and gaining many sympathisers for the cause. In 1864, Babu Kesub Chandra Sen visited Madras and Bombay, and his visit was instrumental in rousing public interest in the cause in those parts and as a consequence the Veda Samaj of Madras was established in that year and the Prarthana Samaj of Bombay came into existence in 1867. The Veda Samaj, after undergoing many reverses of fortune, was finally transformed into the Southern India Brahmo Samaj.

There was also a great development in the faith and practice of the Brahmo Samaj during this period. The Brahmos, though they had ceased to worship idols, were not able get rid of caste distinctions as yet. On occasions of domestic ceremonies, such as, marriages, *sraddhas* (funeral rites) &c, they had still to submit to idolatrous practices. Young Keshub and his friends declared that such association with idolatry was inconsistent and unworthy and they resolved strictly to abjure idolatry and caste. Maharshi Devendra Nath had already shown the way by refusing, against the universal wish of his relatives and to the consternation of the entire Calcutta society, to perform the *sraddha* of his father according to orthodox Hindu rites in 1846. But so far none had dared to follow him. Now at last in Keshub and his young friends he found the men after his mind. He heartily sympathised with the new aspirations of the younger generation; he himself threw away his sacrificial thread. In 1861, Maharshi Devendra

Idolatry and
Caste strictly
interdicted.

First
Brahmo
Marriage.

Nath married one of his daughters according to Brahmo rites ; other Brahmo marriages followed.

Differences
between
Devendra
Nath and
Keshub
Chandra.

For a time the progress of the Brahmo Samaj both within and without, was rapid and extensive. But unfortunately within a few years differences sprang up between Devendra Nath and Keshub. The immediate cause of the misunderstanding was in the old ministers of the Brahmo Samaj who still retained the sacrificial thread. Keshub insisted that those who retained these symbols of idolatry and caste should not be allowed to officiate as ministers. Maharshi Devendra Nath felt unwilling to deal harshly with old members and workers. Keshub was supported by the younger generation, while the older members naturally stood by Devendra Nath. Thus there grew up two parties, the conservative and the progressive, in the Brahmo Samaj. Devendra Nath at first yielded ; those of the old ministers who retained the sacred thread were not allowed to conduct the service, and in their place two younger men of the progressive party who had formally given up caste were appointed as assistant ministers.

First Inter-
caste Mar-
riage.

About this time the progressive party solemnised an inter-caste marriage in the Brahmo Samaj. This further alarmed Maharshi Devendra Nath. Soon after, he re-installed the old ministers consulting the progressive party. They protested against it. As the sole surviving trustee of the Samaj, Devendra Nath withdrew all the powers he had conceded to the younger men, dismissed

them from their offices and removed the *Tattwabodhini Pàtrika* from under their management. Babu Keshub Chandra Sen and the progressive party tried for some time to preserve the union and retain their holds on the affairs of the church by organising *Pratinidhi Sabha* or representative association. But, failing in this, they formed themselves into a separate organisation called *the Brahmo Samaj of India* in November 1866. The bulk of the younger and progressive Brahmos joined the Brahmo Samaj of India, the work of which was carried on with great vigour and enthusiasm. Freed from the restraining influence of the conservative party the Brahmo Samaj of India now entered on a career of reform and expansion all round. The work of propagation was taken up with laudable zeal. Missionaries of the Brahmo Samaj of India began to visit every part of the country. Books and pamphlets on Brahmoism were issued in rapid succession. In 1870, Babu Keshub Chandra Sen, accompanied by a few friends, paid a visit to England, where he was well received by the British public and succeeded in creating a lively interest in the Brahmo Samaj.

The First Schism.

Foundation of the Brahmo Samaj of India.

Internally also the foundation of the Brahmo Samaj of India was followed by many radical changes and developments. One important departure under the Brahmo Samaj of India was in the direction of greater catholicity. Under Devendra Nath the Brahmo Samaj had confined itself practically to Hindu influence and in-

Developments under the Brahmo Samaj of India.

spiration. Keshub Chandra Sen gave it a more universal character. He began to draw upon the scriptures and living inspirations of all the principal historical religions of the world. Devendra Nath, as we have already seen, had compiled a Manual of Brahmoism from the Upanishads. Now as a mark of the catholicity of its principles, a book was published under the auspices of the Brahmo Samaj of India containing passages from all religious scriptures. Another remarkable feature of the Brahmo Samaj of India was the substitution of the vernacular, Bengali, in place of Sanskrit in Brahmo liturgy. Greater simplicity and spontaneity were allowed in the divine services. Individual lives as well as prayer meetings were marked by greater devotional fervour. Sentiments about prayer, repentance and conscience gained wider currency in the Samaj. Of all these developments Keshub Chandra Sen was the soul. Under his leadership, the progressive Brahmos moved the Government of India to clear up the uncertainty as to the legality of the Brahmo marriage and got a law passed in the year 1872, thenceforth known as Act III of 1872, which laid down fourteen as the minimum marriageable age for women and eighteen for men.

Passing of
Act III of
1872.

Things went on well for sometime, But ultimately Keshub Chandra Sen also failed to retain the confidence of the entire growing body of his followers. Within the Brahmo Samaj of India, again, there appeared a progressive section

Dissatis-
faction for
want of a
constitution.

which did not like the latter-day autocratic methods of Keshub Chandra Sen. They clamoured for representative organisations for conducting the work of the Samaj and for more radical reform in social life, specially as regards the position of women. Under an apparently smooth and prosperous surface, there was a strong pent-up dissatisfaction with the methods of Keshub and his immediate *entourage*.

At this juncture, there happened a fateful event in the history of the Brahmo Samaj. In the beginning of 1878, the Brahmo community was taken by surprise at the intelligence of the proposed marriage of the eldest daughter of Babu Keshub Chandra Sen with the young Maharaja of Cooch Behar. Both the bride and the bride-groom were below the minimum marriageable age, fourteen and eighteen respectively, fixed by Babu Keshub Chandra Sen himself and adopted by the Brahmo community. The bridegroom was not a Brahmo; and it was rumoured that the marriage was to be celebrated according to the idolatrous Hindu ritual of the Cooch Behar Raj family. Earnest protests poured in from many Samajes and individual Brahmos, expressing the widespread concern of the whole Brahmo community. It was feared that such a compromise with the principles of the Brahmo Samaj by its leader and minister would discredit and ruin the cause irretrievably. Babu Keshub Chandra Sen gave no heed to the protests and proceeded in person to Cooch Behar to celebrate the marriage. When it actually came

The Cooch
Behar Mar-
riage.

off, it was found that most of the requirements of a Brahmo marriage were dispensed with and there were other features highly objectionable in the eyes of the Brahmos.

The second
Schism.

As Babu Keshub Chandra Sen returned from Cooch Behar, the protesters wanted to move a vote of censure against him at a meeting of the Brahmo Samaj of India; but Babu Keshub Chandra Sen, who was the Secretary of the Samaj, foiled their attempts by putting obstacles in the way of holding the meeting. They, however, passed a resolution at a meeting of the congregation deposing him from the office of Minister. But Babu Keshub Chandra Sen did not give any heed to the constitutional laws of the Samaj and forcibly retained the post of Minister with the help of the Police. The protesters in despair and indignation formed themselves into a separate organisation, called the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, the work of which would be carried on according to strictly constitutional methods.

Inaugura-
tion of the
Sadharan
Brahmo
Samaj.

The Sadharan Brahmo Samaj was formally inaugurated at a public meeting held in the Town Hall of Calcutta in May 1878. The majority of the mofussil Samajes associated themselves with it. The first care of the new organisation was to provide against the possibility of the assumption of all power by one person, enabling him to set at naught the views and opinions of the entire body, as had been the case on the occasion of both the schisms. A thoroughly representative

constitution was given to the new body. The governing body was to be elected annually by the votes of the entire body of members. The mofussil Samajes were entitled to send their representatives to the governing body. The new organisation soon became the main channel of Theistic life and work in India. By 1880 a spacious Prayer Hall in the central part of Calcutta was constructed for it.

Babu Keshub Chandra Sen and those Brahmos who remained with him also redoubled their energy. They were in possession of the Prayer Hall and all the properties and resources of the old united Samaj, and had thus a great advantage over the new organisation. Moreover, almost all the old missionaries, personally very much attached to Babu Keshub Chandra Sen, stood by him. With their loyal co-operation he sent out mission parties to different parts of the country. He also introduced many novel mystic forms of religious practice; and in 1880 he changed the name of his Church into the '*New Dispensation*' and selected twelve of his missionaries to be called the Apostles of the New Dispensation. His unique career, however, was soon cut short by the hand of death. The strenuous labours of the past years and the pain caused by the secession of the majority of Brahmos and Brahmo Samajes and by the internal dissensions among his own missionaries told heavily on his health; and in January 1884 he passed away from this world. After his death, the Church of the New Dispen-

Renewed
efforts of
Keshub
Chandra
Sen,

Keshub's
death.

sation became still more disorganised. The apostles and missionaries could not agree among themselves. But though the common organisation has broken down, many of the missionaries have been individually carrying on the work with exemplary devotion and self-sacrifice.

Progress
under the
Sadharan
Brahmo
Samaj.

The foundation of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj was marked by another outburst of propagandist activity. There was a general enthusiasm among the Brahmo public. Many new congregations were organised and old congregations drawn closer, forming an influential Church. Several new and powerful institutions were started in Calcutta, which have ever since been doing valuable work in the field of religious and social reform. The organisation of the Brahmo Samaj seems now to have at last found a stable form. More than thirty years have elapsed since the formation of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj. But, where as the previous thirty years witnessed two violent and disastrous schisms, the subsequent history has been one of smooth, steady growth. In the free atmosphere of a progressive church like the Brahmo Samaj, differences of opinion are inevitable and natural. Such differences there undoubtedly are among the members of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj; but with its broad, liberal, representative constitution founded on the principle of unity in essentials, difference in non-essentials and charity in all, men and women of all shades of Theistic belief have found it possible to co-operate for the glory of God and the good of man.

CHAPTER II.

God.

The conception of God is the central point in religion. Every form of religion starts with its own conception of God. The very first question which the inquirer asks and on the proper understanding of which all further exposition depends is, "What is the Brahmo conception of God."

The Brahmo conception of God.

The question of the nature of God is almost as old as humanity itself; but the answer is by no means easy, and it has been made less so by the many speculations that have become, by common usage or the ingenuity of the philosophers, associated with it. One of the most ancient difficulties perceived to beset this problem is the plea, which has found such powerful and popular expositors in modern times in thinkers like Spencer and Huxley, that God, even if He exists, cannot be known, the Infinite by its very definition transcending the powers of human understanding. The ancient *Rishis* of India clearly recognised this aspect of the Divine nature. They said,

Can God be known ?

यतो वाचो निवर्तन्ते अप्राप्य मनसा सह

"From whom speech with thought turns away without finding (an end)." The Brahmo Samaj, in its protest against the ethnic, anthropomorphic and finite conceptions of God, is sometimes believed to have played into the hands of the Agnostics. It is argued, that

as the Brahmo holds his God to be Eternal and Infinite, transcending speech and thought, He cannot be known.

Reply to the
Agnostic.

The modern mind seems too much over-awed by the agnostic plea. It is commonly believed, and perhaps not unoften apprehended even by the adherents of Theism, that the Agnostic argument has, for ever, undermined the basis of faith in God. But the legitimate demands of the Agnostic do not in the least touch the theistic position. The ancient theologians of India will be found to have disposed of the Agnostic objection once for all in one brief conclusive sentence,

नाहं मन्ये स्रवेदेति नो न वेदेति वेद च

योनस्तद्वेद तद्वेद नो न वेदेति वेद च ।

"It is not that I know Him well, nor is it that I do not know Him. He among us who knows the meaning of the proposition that I know Him and yet do not know Him,—he knows Him." A more satisfactory and conclusive reply to the Agnostic can hardly be imagined. God indeed, is infinite; *transcends* all powers of speech and thought; finite intelligence cannot *comprehend* him. Yet it cannot be said that we do not know Him. The Infinite is not a blank to the human intelligence. When we speak of the Infinite, the conception before our mind is not one of perfect void, nothingness, nor is it a mere negation. We know that the Infinite is not finite, we do not confound the Infinite with any finite thing, however grand or sublime. In fact, the conception of the Infinite is as positive in our thought as that of the

finite ; only the expression is necessarily negative. The limits of the sky, for example, the human senses do not see, nor can ever see; neither even in imagination can we picture the end of space; but we do not therefore say that we do not know the sky or space. God, as the Infinite, transcends the powers of finite intelligence; man's mind cannot comprehend him; yet it is perfectly legitimate to hold that our mind knows Him, apprehends Him, touches Him at certain points. The Infinite embraces the finite within itself, though ultimately extending far beyond it. The Brahmo, therefore, in perfect confidence declares with the *Rishis* of the Upanishads,

नाहं मन्ये सुवेदति नो न वेदति वेद च
योनस्तद्वेद तद्वेद नो न वेदति वेद च ।

"It is not that I know Him well, nor is it that I do not know Him. He among us who knows the meaning of the proposition that I know Him and yet do not know Him,—he knows Him."

There is another mist of ancient controversy around the conception of God, which, though not peculiar to India, has had a special charm for the subtleties of the Indian intellect. From a very early time the Indian theologians have exhausted all the ingenuity of their dialectics and the resource of their philosophies in the discussion of the question whether God is सगुण or निर्गुण, terms which, though rather difficult to translate into western phraseology may be rendered into English as the Qualified and the Unqualified, the Personal and the Impersonal.

The controversy of Saguna and Nirguna Brahma.

Here, again, the difficulty has been unnecessarily

Its solution

and unwarrantably exaggerated. The antithesis between the two terms has been needlessly intensified. God, the Supreme Being over the Universe, is not a person like ourselves, not limited by qualities as finite beings are. He is certainly निर्गुण, unqualified, in the sense that He is beyond qualities. But that does not mean that He has no qualities; being निगुण He can as well be सगुण or, as the theistic theologians of India have said, सकलकल्याणगुणसमन्वितः, full of all auspicious qualities. We know that the auspicious qualities, such as, love, compassion, mercy, are valuable and acceptable to us in so far as they have their origin in a higher nature than ourselves; they are sacred to man, in as much as they are Divine in their essence. We know that the Divine nature cannot be less than loving, compassionate, merciful, however far, it may transcend the connotations of these terms. We cannot conceive that God is devoid of, or indifferent to these, qualities which we justly hold so precious and sacred in man; and if God cannot be indifferent to them, they must derive their sanction and sanctity from being of His essence. In this sense He is surely सगुण, possessed of the qualities, personal. But he is also impersonal, in so far as His nature is not hemmed in by the limitations we see associated with human nature. He is निर्गुण in the sense that He transcends all qualities. He is Infinite in His qualities; the few phrases of human vocabulary and thought, the categories of human character,—love, compassion, mercy etc,—do not exhaust the infinitude of the Divine nature. Moreover, His love, His compassion, His mercy in themselves far transcend the sublimest

conception we are capable of these qualities. The theistic theologians of India have endeavoured to indicate the nature of God by three pregnant terms, सत् चित् आनन्द, Existence or Power, Wisdom and Bliss or Love. These Brahmoism accepts as real elements of the Divine Essence; only it must not be taken to mean that they in any way exhaust the infinitude of the Nature. Even the auspicious qualities known to human thought and conscience do not completely and perfectly reveal the beauty and fullness of their prototypes in the Divine Nature. Love in God far transcends the love manifested in the noblest of created beings.

Yet another pair of antithetic terms commonly believed to entangle any enunciation of the Divine Nature has to be noticed in this connection; and here the problem has presented itself more keenly to the Western than to the Eastern mind. The schools of Western philosophy have been puzzled by the question, whether God is transcendent or immanent, as the orientals have been by that of सगुण and निर्गुण.

The controversy of Transcendence and Immanence.

But here also the difficulty is more imaginary than real. The Brahmo finds no serious difficulty in reconciling these seemingly irreconcilable conceptions. God, indeed, is immanent. He is not an extra-cosmic, mechanical artificer of the universe. To the Brahmo, as to the *Rishis* of old,

Its solution.

“The Deity who is in fire, who is in water, who pervades the universe, who is in the smallest shrub (as much as) in the largest forest-tree, He is the God; to Him we offer salutations.”

यो देवोऽनौ योऽष्ट, यो विश्वं भुवनमाविश ।
 यं ओषधिषु यो वनस्पतिषु तस्मै देवाय नमो नमः ॥

Earth and sky, life and matter, time and eternity, are all in Him. Whatever is, is in Him, of Him, through Him. He is the Soul of our souls.

श्रोत्रस्य श्रोत्रं मनसो मनो यहाचोद्वाचम् ।
 स उ प्राणयथ प्राणश्चक्षुषश्चक्षुः ॥

"He is the ear of our ears, the mind of our mind, the word of our word, the life of our life, and the eye of our eye." So far He is the God Immanent. But the created universe does not exhaust the possibilities of His Infinitude. The universe with all its immensity is but a wave in the infinite ocean of the Divine, a ray coming out of Him. The sun and the moon are not more than the smallest fraction of His Infinity.

न तत्र सूर्यो भाति न चन्द्रतारकं नेमा विद्युर्तो भान्ति कुतोऽयमग्निः ।

"In Him the light of the sun fades, the moon and stars do not shine, not even those lightnings, not to speak of this fire." Beyond the actual, He is the Infinite, Exhaustless, Eternal. In the universe He is the Immanent; beyond it He is the Transcendent in His own Infinitude.

Thus we reach a conception of God, simple, sweet, grand and satisfying. He is indeed infinite, transcending all the powers of finite reason, yet He is not altogether unknown to us. By the very nature of the subject a definition is out of place. The only definition possible is by indicating the

The result
summed up.

effects of His Being. Indeed, that is a qualification attaching not to the conception of God alone. Of no ultimate reality can we give any other kind of definition. The definitions, which science gives of matter, force, electricity, light &c. are exactly of the same nature. What these things are in themselves science does not pretend to say; the only definition attempted is by an indication of their effects. If a definition of God is pressed for, it is perfectly scientific and satisfying to say in the words of the Upanishad,

A practical
Definition.

यतो वा इमानि भूतानि जायन्ते येन जातानि जीवन्ति ।

यत् प्रयन्त्यभिसंविशन्ति तद्विजिज्ञासस्व, तत् ब्रह्म ।

"He from whom these things are born, He in whom created beings live, and going from here in whom they rest, know Him, He is the God."

God is the ultimate, unanalysable substratum of the universe, in whom all that is and all that can be live and move and have their being. What He in Himself is we cannot know in fulness; but what we know of Him is enough for the satisfaction of our human needs. He is Infinite in His qualities. The human intellect can never fathom the depths of His infinitude; speech as well as mind do, indeed, "turn away without finding the end;" but equally surely we know that we know Him, we can hold direct communion with Him. Intellectually we know that He is the ultimate Principle, the fundamental Substance of the universe, the prime Reality, call it existence, mind, energy, or whatever else you will, from whom all

God, the
source and
substratum
of the
Universe.

that is has sprung and by whom it is sustained every moment. The created universe is only an insignificant manifestations of this God. In Him there is the potency of infinite universes like the existing one.

An intelli-
gent power.

Our knowledge, however, does not stop here. It is not that all we know is that God is a mere vague, indefinite something from which the universe has been evolved; but consistently with our reverent recognition of the littleness of human knowledge, we can also add that we get glimpses of Him—which in comparison with His infinitude are glimpses only, but which to us are almost too abundant and dazzling a light. We know that the ultimate Principle underlying the universe is intelligent, not a blind, mechanical force; everywhere in creation, from the mass underneath the feet up to the farthest star overhead, in the dead particle of matter as much as in the noblest human life, in the momentary existence of the moth as well as in the evolution of the grandest drama of human history, there is an unmistakable, undeniable shining forth of intelligence, of wisdom. Whatever else the underlying Principle of the universe may be, we are sure that it is not blind, aimless, purposeless; it is Intelligent.

Making for
Righteous-
ness.

Equally unmistakable are the evidences of that Intelligent Principle being moral; it makes for righteousness. In the constitution of the universe we find that every provision has been made for the upholding of righteousness, truth, rectitude, justice and purity. In human consciousness and

human society that moral principle has blossomed forth into a conscience; what is revealed in nature as an underlying principle has become a self-conscious, authoritative witness in man.

Deeper and further analysis of the constitution of the universe brings us face to face with love. Not only do we find here inexorable law of stern justice but, transcending and transforming justice, there is love, "which beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things and endureth all things." The *Rishis* of the Upanishads were not satisfied with merely stating indefinitely that the sum-total of existences has sprung from an indefinite something. They began, indeed, with the indefinite proposition यतो वा इमानि भूतानि जायन्ते &c., "He from whom all these things were born"; but at the next step they found something surer and pealed forth with a shout of joy. "आनन्दाद्देव खल्विमानि भूतानि जायन्ते", "From Love have all these things been born," thus laying hold on the grandest conception of "God is Love."

God is Love.

Gathering up the assets of all these experiences of human nature in its intellectual, emotional and moral aspects, we reach a sublime conception of God as "the Eternal in the transient phenomena, the Consciousness in conscious beings, the One who provides the desires of all, presiding in the human soul"—

नित्योऽनित्यानाम् चेतनश्चेतनानामेकोवहूनाम् यो विदधाति कामान्
तमात्मस्थं,

"God in nature, God in the human soul and God as the Providence in human society."

Deeper insight into the Divine Nature.

There is yet a higher and more precious testimony when the pure heart sees Him face to face, hears His voice, receives His inspiration. In nature and human society, we know Him as a Power ordering everything, as an underlying Intelligent Principle making unailing for righteousness. But to the pure soul, He reveals Himself more closely, intimately, as the Father, the Dear One holding immediate, individual, personal relationship with His children—the deepest and grandest mystery of creation, nevertheless, as true and resting on as sure a foundation of facts as the law that in nature every atom attracts every other atom.

All these facts of human experience the Brahmo Samaj formulates in the words of the Rishis, not as a dogma, but as a necessarily imperfect indication of the Divine Nature,

सत्यं ज्ञानमनन्तम् ब्रह्म आनन्दरूपममृतं यद्विभाति ।

शान्तं शिवमद्वैतम् शुभ्र अपापविद्धम् ॥

“The Reality, the Wisdom, the Infinite, shining as the Love and the Bliss, the Peace, the Goodness and the Holiness, the One Undivided.”—Such is the Brahmo conception of God.”

CHAPTER III

Man.

Next after the idea of God, the conception of man occupies the most important place in religion. Naturally, therefore, it has given rise to an abundant harvest of wrangling and misunderstanding in the theological world. But a right apprehension of the problem here is of even more practical importance to true religion. The question, unfortunately, has been very much complicated by the morbid speculative tendency of the 'schools', and the word 'soul' has veritably been hedged round with endless controversies. Broadly speaking, on the one side, there have been thinkers who deny the existence of a soul distinct from the body. All the phenomena popularly attributed to the soul are entirely the outcome of the working of the higher organs of the body. The brain and the nerve-cells alone explain all the wondrous activities of the human mind and conscience. They, indeed, look so very different from the phenomena of the material world, but they are as much material as the ordered movements of a machine. Quite at the opposite pole, there have been others who hold that not only is the soul not matter but it is God Himself. This is a doctrine in a way peculiar to India. From a very early time many of our theologians have taken delight in identifying the human soul with God. According to them, there is no such

Controversies about soul.

Soul is nothing but matter.

Soul is God.

thing as the individual soul, the distinct self-consciousness of the individual being only an illusion.

Brahmo
conception
of soul.

It is not necessary for our present purpose to enter into a detailed examination of these theories. All that we are concerned with at present is a statement of the Brahmo conception of the soul or man. Steering clear of both the extremes, the Brahmo Samaj, on the unmistakable testimony of nature, believes in the reality and individuality of the soul. Man according to the Brahmo Samaj, is not a finely-wrought delicate machine kept up and worked for a certain number of years by the play of heat and cold and in the end collapsing with the decay of the constituent parts. The material frame, the senses, the nervous system, the brain are essential to the activities of our being ; the eye is necessary for seeing, the brain for thinking, but it is not the eye that sees, nor the brain that thinks ; there is an ego, 'I', behind all the organs and their functions, a 'self' or 'soul' other than the material organism, a spiritual entity, which is not hurt by the loss of any of the organs and which endures when the whole organism becomes inoperative.

Man is im-
mortal spirit

The Brahmo believes in the spirituality of the soul as much as in the existence of God, and from its spirituality its immortality follows almost as a corollary. The belief in the immortality of the soul is, if not an immediate intuition, an instinct of human nature. This instinctive certitude is corroborated by an analysis of the contents of our intellectual, moral and emotional experience.

The belief in a life after death is universal and persistently obtrusive. The human heart has tenaciously clung to it in the midst of the rapid and sweeping intellectual changes of ages. Even after the corrosive influence of present-day scepticism, all that is necessary is not a demonstration of its existence, but only a clearing of certain doubts to have been cast on this ancient anchorage of the human heart by modern knowledge.

The main difficulty in the way of faith in an after-life is supposed to lie in the dictum that whatever has a beginning must have an end. But that dictum, however plausible, is not universally true. On the other hand, its converse proposition has been proved to be a scientific truth. In the earlier unscientific ages in the world of matter the popular mind was confronted with the phenomenon of universal extinction. But science has proved that extinction is not annihilation; what seems to vanish away continues to exist in another form. Even in the material world it is not true that what begins must end; rather it is truer to say that what begins continues to run its course eternally. "What, indeed, does Newton's first law declare," says Dr. Martineau, "but that a particle once set in motion in empty space will continue to move in a straight line with uniform velocity for ever, unless some external force supervenes? And if we can think of the law of gravitation as having been given to the material of the universe, surely we are not on that account compelled by any logical necessity to anticipate its cessation." If

Faith in an after-life vindicated.

universal extinction is not true in the material world much less so is it in the spiritual world. In the spiritual world our material conceptions of quantity do not apply at all. Here use does not mean waste but increase ; in the spiritual world it is absolutely true that he who loses saves, and he that saves loses. It is therefore not necessary at all to believe that because the soul has a beginning, therefore it must have an end.

Testimony of
the human
nature.

The universal belief and aspiration of humanity cannot be lightly dismissed. The constitution of human nature is a guarantee of the immortality of the soul. Man is not a creature of the moment. His whole nature points towards eternity. The range of his intellect, the depth of his heart, the majesty of his will would be egregiously out of correspondence with the span of his earthly existence.

“Sure, He that made us with such large discourse,
Looking before and after, gave us not
That capability and god-like reason”

to end in the grave. If it were so, it would be an astounding wastage in a universe where the most careful economy is observed in everything, where “not a worm is cloven in vain” and “not a moth with vain desire is shrivelled in a fruitless fire.” If the grave were the end of human life, either madness or wickedness were at the bottom of this universe, and “God a wicked maniac.”

“My own dim life should teach me this,
That life shall live for evermore

Else earth is darkness at the core,
 And dust and ashes all that is ;
 This round of green, this orb of flame,
 Fantastic beauty ; such as lurks
 In some wild Poet, when he works
 Without a conscience or an aim.
 What then were God to such as I ?
 'Twere hardly worth my while to choose
 Of things all mortal, or to use
 A little patience ere I die."

The argu-
 ment from
 moral life.

Every fact of human consciousness necessitates a faith in the existence of a life after death. But there is one group of human experiences which cannot but carry conviction even to the simplest mind. There is an apparent failure of righteousness and miscarriage of justice within our human experience. There is no doubt a vast provision in the constitution of the visible universe for the righting of wrong and the upholding of goodness. But even taking into consideration the joys of an innocent conscience and the hidden shame of wrongdoing, it cannot be said that within the bounds of mundane life we have always an exact reckoning of good and evil with their adequate reward and punishment. The demands of our moral sense, therefore, land us on the shores of a realm where justice is fulfilled and righteousness is exalted. Dr. Martineau, after an admirable analysis of the contents of the moral sense, comes to the following conclusion : "It is impossible to admit that our moral nature runs through its own cycle and fulfils its own idea in our experience here. It announces

a righteous rule which again and again it brings to mind and will not suffer to be forgotten, but of which it does not secure the execution. It is a prophecy carrying its own credentials in an incipient foretaste of the end but holding its realisation in reserve : and if Death gives final discharge alike to the sinner and the saint, we are warranted in saying that "Conscience has told more lies than it has ever called to their account." We are thus constrained to believe in the continuance of life after death in some form the details of which we do not know, but which conserves and fulfils the assets of our intellectual, moral and spiritual life. The Brahmo Samaj, therefore, conjoins the immortality of the human soul with the belief in an Eternal and Infinite God as the fundamental facts of religious experience. "God is our highest proof of a future life."

Question of the pre-existence of the soul.

The Brahmo-attitude on the question.

As a sequel to, and symmetrical extension of the faith in immortality, a belief in the pre-existence of the soul has been supposed necessary among the Indian schools of thought. As death is not the end of the soul, so, it is argued, birth is not its beginning. There is surely a fair plausibility in this argument. The Brahmo Samaj does not deny the possibility of a previous existence of the soul but there is not that constraining necessity, nor even a fair evidence, for the belief in the pre-existence of the soul, which there is in the case of its continuance after death. Were there no life after death, there would be an undeniable collapse of theism, or of all religion, for the matter of the

The demands of our moral sense, our spiritual aspirations, would remain unsatisfied, if death were the close of the drama of individual existence. Life here is at best a probation, not the fulfilment, of our highest nature. Belief in immortality is, as we have seen, necessitated by our intellectual, moral and emotional experiences.

But there is no such constraining necessity about faith in the pre-existence of the soul. Some suppose that in the visible differences in the lots of individual persons there is an unanswerable argument in favour of the belief in a previous birth. We find such apparent and unjustifiable differences in the circumstances of different persons ; one is born poor, another rich ; one cursed with a miserable frame, abode of all diseases, another healthy and strong ; and so on. These cruel differences, are inconsistent with divine justice and can be explained only by belief in a previous birth the good or evil deeds of which secure a happy or miserable lot in this life. The belief in a previous birth, or transmigration of the soul, which has taken such a strong hold of the Indian mind, had its origin evidently in these apparent inequalities of individual circumstances. It has been associated in the popular mind with the prevailing doctrine of *Karma*. The law of *Karma* in itself is a perfectly legitimate and same principle equivalent in effect to the law of cause and effect. The Brahmo Samaj unhesitatingly accepts the law of *Karma* proper, which means that every action good or bad must have its rightful reward or punishment meted to it. It forms

Previous birth postulated to explain inequalities of life.

The Law of Karma.

Theory of transmigration does not explain the inequalities of individual lots.

the very foundation of Brahmo ethics. But the law of *Karma* must not be confounded with the doctrine of transmigration or previous birth. The support believed to be lent by the one to the other as also by the postulate of divine justice, is entirely illusory. The relief given by the doctrine of transmigration to the apparent partiality of Providence as manifested in the inequalities of human lot will be found on closer examination to be all but imaginary. If the inequalities of the present life are to be attributed to the good or bad actions of a previous existence, there comes the further question, how came the good and bad actions in the previous life, and the only possible escape to push them back to a still earlier existence, and thence to one still further back *ad infinitum*, so that the doctrine of a previous birth does not account for the inequalities of life ; it only shoves them from the present to the past. But if there are real inequalities, the question still remains, even if they are pushed back to the hundredth or thousandth life in the rear, how came inequalities at all ? If God created men equal, how came the first inequality ? The theory of a previous birth relieves the tension on neither the law of *Karma* nor the belief in divine justice. If you say the circumstances of the present are the outcome of *Karma* in a past life, how came the first *Karma* which is the source of all subsequent *Karmas* and conditions ? And how is divine justice exonerated from the charge of partiality by pushing back the difficulty from the present to the past ?

Not only does the doctrine of a previous birth fail to relieve the difficulties of our faith in divine justice in the face of the seeming inequalities of individual lots, but it goes straight against our moral sense and the demands of all human conceptions of justice. For our sense of justice requires that the knowledge of the offence must go with the infliction of punishment. Punishment, whether retributive or educative, is ineffectual without the knowledge of the guilt. If it is merely retributive, our moral sense requires that the cause of punishment must be known. Even human law does not inflict a punishment without specifying the offence committed. If the punishment is disciplinary or educative, it is entirely useless without a clear and explicit knowledge of the guilt. If the erring culprit does not know for what he is punished, how can he mend himself?

The doctrine of a previous birth, therefore, far from solving the problem of the apparent failure of justice in the constitution of human society, leads us to fresh and inextricable difficulties. A belief or disbelief in it, however, is immaterial to Theism. The Brahmo Samaj does not insist on any dogmatic pronouncement on the question either on the positive or on the negative side. The faith of the Brahmo remains untouched whether the present individual had a history in the past or the momentous drama began with the present life. The exact hour in the march of the eternity when an individual commences its history is immaterial to Theism, so long as its contents

are found to be consistent with laws of righteousness.

The indisputable stand-point of the Brahmo Samaj.

Leaving, therefore, to individual speculation the question of the previous existence of the soul, the Brahmo Samaj takes its stand on the firm ground of the consciousness of the present, viz., "I am I" ; whether I had a previous history or not, here I am, a rational being, with certain powers and capabilities and with a sense of individuality and responsibility. Beyond that we need not go.

An essential factor of Theism.

All that is required for theism is that man is a real entity having an existence of his own which is a not nothingness. On the one hand, the materialist makes theism impossible by identifying the soul with matter, holding it to be only a function of the brain and the nerve-cells and ceasing to exist with the disintegration of the physical frame. On the other hand, in India there has been a menace to theism, equally destructive, from another quarter. There has been from a very early time a school of philosophers in India who have identified the human soul with God, If by this it is meant that the human soul had its origin from God, is of the essence of God, the theist would not only take no objection to, but would heartily welcome it. But if it is meant to deny the separate existence of man as an individual, the theist can have nothing to do with it.

Individuality and responsibility of man.

The individuality of man is the axiom as well as the postulate of all religion. Deny the individuality of man, deny the existence of the soul as an individual, responsible agent or entity, and all religion, all morality, will at once collapse. Man is

not God ; our primary consciousness and common sense at once and without hesitation declare the absurdity of such an identification. Man is from God, in God, of God ; but he is not God. As a modern thinker has said, "That monism which merges *man* in God is to my mind mischievous and false. It stands forth to me as a primary truth of consciousness that the human soul is other than God. I know not how God created me. But I know that I am an individual self, standing confronting Him, and not merged in Him. And this otherness of man from God seems to me to be the condition of all prayer, all moral life, the index to the capital facts of temptation, of penitence, of thankfulness, of aspiration, of communion, and of prayer". Born of the essence of God, created by God and sustained by Him every moment, deriving all his strength and power from Him, yet for the present he holds a distinct individual existence and responsibility which will be continued to eternity. The spiritual progress of the soul, according to the Brahmo Samaj, does not mean its annihilation, or merging in the Being of God, but increasing harmony with His will, continuous growth in knowledge, love and purity. The ancient Hindu scriptures, on the supposed authority of which the identity of God and man is affirmed, emphatically declare the distinct individuality of the human soul :

द्वा सुपर्णा सयुजा सखाया समानं वृक्षं परिषस्वजाते ।

"Two beautiful birds, friends of each other and always living together, inhabit the same tree."

CHAPTTR IV.

Nature.

God the all-
pervading, in-
dwelling
Spirit.

After the somewhat detailed exposition of the conceptions of God and Man set forth in the previous chapters, it will not be necessary to say much about the Brahmo conception of Nature. God, according to the Brahmo Samaj, is the cause and source of all that exists; so that nature, earth and the heavens are all His creation. It has also been seen that God is not an absentee, extramundane artificer who sits apart after having fashioned his handiwork. He is the immanent, indwelling Spirit pervading the universe. Every atom of matter, every form of life, is instinct with His presence and power. Without Him, nothing can exist even for a moment.

कोह्येवान्यात् कः प्राण्यात् यदेष आकाशआनन्दोन स्यात् ।

“Who would move or who would live, if this Love were not existing?” The sun shines, the wind blows and the fire gives heat by His might.

भयादस्य अग्निस्तपति भयात्तपति सूर्य

भयादिन्द्रश्च वायुश्च मृत्युर्धावतिपञ्चमः

Theism as
distinct from
Deism and
Pantheism.

All that is through Him and in Him. Thus there is a vast difference between the religion of the Brahmo Samaj and the cold mechanical deism of the eighteenth century. Similarly it differs radically from that pantheism, so common in India

as, indeed, to all poetic temperament, which identifies God with Nature. For, though the Brahmo sees God in all and all in God, though every blade of grass and every form of life is instinct with the Divine Presence, his God is not the sum-total of the existing universe. While immanent in every particle of matter and in every moment of time, God transcends the existing universe in infinite ways. There is in Him the possibility of countless universes.

Nature is therefore not mere dead matter ; nor is it the arena for the clash of the blind forces. Nature is the temple and handiwork of God. It is God who is preserving it and working in it every moment of time. The method of His working He has, no doubt, committed to definite and invariable ways. And those abiding methods of God's working are what Science calls laws of nature. It is in keeping with His nature that His working should be on certain eternal principles. A world where there were no abiding laws, where the same cause did not produce the same effect, where whims and caprices, though of the most benevolent autocrat imaginable, determined the course of events, would be as inconsistent with the known nature of God as it would be impossible for the habitation of intelligent and responsible beings. The exact methods of God's working are left to Science to determine. Thus the Brahmo Samaj has solved the ancient conflict of religion and science. The laws of nature are the methods of divine providence. Science is reading and interpreting the methods of

Nature the
Temple of
God.

Natural laws
the methods
of Divine
activity.

Demarcation
of the
spheres of
religion and
science.

God in nature. Every law that science discovers increases our knowledge of the ways of God. Science has therefore become the hand-maid of religion. Brahmoism leaves science entirely free to deal with the phenomena of nature and accepts all its discoveries as God's, truth. It is immaterial to Theism whether God created the universe in six days or in six millions of years, slowly evolving higher life from lower, cosmos out of chaos, establishing order and beauty where there were disorder and ugliness. A universe in which every blade of grass, every germ of life, every page of history, reveals an inexhaustible store of wisdom, love and righteousness, presupposes an intelligent, righteous Love behind it, even though the unfolding of it is spread over an infinity. The Power or Mind or Love which was formerly posited in a particular spot or epoch is now found to operate in every atom of space and at every moment of time. The universe thus becomes a temple of God, a circle with its centre everywhere and circumference nowhere. The distinction between sacred and secular vanishes. Where shall we point our finger and say, 'here God is not?'

It is evident that such a conception of the universe leaves no room for morbid pessimism. It gives a solemn sanctity to human life and institutions. The world is not an illusion, as we also are not phantoms. Human life is not a blunder or a bane. And home and society, the sweet relations of love and duty that bind us to each other, are not fetters to be snapped asunder as fast as we

Science free
to interpret
the methods
of God

Life a trust
and home a
sanctuary.

can. We are not amidst a snare to get out of which is salvation. If we were, it would be difficult to explain who could have planted us here but a wicked devil. But the Brahmo Samaj emphatically repudiates the belief in a second Principle working in the universe. And a benevolent God could not have led us into a snare. The theory of the world as a snare, or of life as an evil, must go for ever. It is holy ground we tread on. The pure soul is the heaven where God dwells, and the human hearth the most sacred sanctuary. It is a Love that has planted us in a world of love for the perfection of our nature. It is Holiness that has placed us in a moral universe for the development of our moral nature. Far from its being necessary for the seeker after spiritual culture to flee away from the world and society, the scene where he is placed with his individual struggles and temptations, his domestic trials and obligations, his social duties and difficulties, is the holiest shrine of God for him. What mountain-cave can give one a clearer vision of God than the altar of duty where the love of parents and children, of wife and husband, of friend and fellow-man, is the most fragrant incense imaginable burning day and night, where sorrow calls for compassion and suffering wakes up the noblest potentialities of our nature, and where the fellowship of the good, the noble and the saintly is a constant aid to holy living? Not to turn away from the trials and tasks of life but to face them manfully and in the love of God, to bear the cross in faith and hope, to serve our fellow-

Society the
school of
self-culture.

men with all our strength and might, and if it be not given to us to achieve anything remarkable, at least to breathe pure inspiration into all that we do not say and think, this is the key to a right understanding of life and its mission.

लोकेश चैतन्यमयाधिदेव माङ्गल्यविष्णो भवदाज्ञयैव

हिताय लोकस्य तत्प्रियार्थं संसारयासामनुबर्त्तिस्ये ।

“O Thou Lord of creation, Thou Supreme God whose nature is light and righteousness, at Thy behest, for Thy glory and the good of humanity live I this life.”—this is the true standpoint of the Brahmo!

CHAPTER V

Workship.

Brahmoism is primarily and essentially a religion of worship. The central point in the religion of the Brahmo Samaj is the spiritual worship of the One True God. Religion, according to the Brahmo, is not a set of correct doctrines, nor is it an ecclesiastical discipline, but it is at bottom a living, loving, personal relationship with God. The Brahmo Samaj, therefore, lays the greatest emphasis on worship, which is the channel of communication between God and man. By worship the Brahmo does not understand the observance of a set of rituals, external ceremonies, or the uttering of certain formulas ; to him worship is the communion of the soul with God ; on the part of man, it is the opening of his soul, the outpouring of his aspirations, the acknowledgment of his failures and transgressions and the consecration of his life and work to God as his Lord, Refuge and Guide ; and on the part of God, the communication of His light, strength, inspiration and blessing unto the longing soul. Worship is not the offering of a sacrifice to appease the vengeance of an angry God or to buy the good-will of an Almighty Autocrat who can do us good or evil at His pleasure ; but it is the spontaneous expression of the natural relationship between God and man. It is the outpouring of

**Brahmoism
a religion of
worship.**

**Worship—
the means of
communion
between God
and man.**

THE RELIGION OF THE BRAHMO SAMAJ.

Worship the
crown and
glory of hu-
man life.

the love of the child towards the Father. Just as it is natural for the son to cry "Abba, Father," for the child to cling to its mother, so it is for man to worship his God. Just as it is natural for the flame of a burning fire to go up, so it is for the aspirations of the human soul, its longings, sorrows and sufferings to tend upward to the Throne of God. As the flower is the fulfilment of the plant life, so the worship of God, is the fulfilment of human life. Worship is its own reward. It is the crown and glory of human life. A life without worship is like a plant that does not bear flower or yield fruit. It misses the highest joy as well as the truest realisation of human destiny. Worship is the daily bread of spiritual life. What food is to the physical life worship of God is to the spiritual life.

Worship
possible for
all at all
times.

If worship is to the spiritual life what food is to the physical, it follows at once that worship should be as much within the easy reach of all classes and conditions of men and women. Accordingly the Brahmo Samaj maintains that no special place or time, neither a temple nor an auspicious hour, is essential to the worship of God. Wherever the soul looks up to God in love and reverence, there is the holiest temple of God. Every moment of eternity is sanctified with the Divine Presence, and the longing soul need not wait for the auspicious day. No material offerings or costly presents are necessary for the worship of God, himself the Giver of all gifts. The only essential thing in worship is a sincere and longing heart. Where the

penitent soul pants for the breath of God, nothing can stand in between.

The Brahmo Samaj does not recognise any specially privileged priestly class as the mediators between God and man. God is our Father ; and none can love us so much as He. It is absurd to say that we need a third person to reconcile us to Him or to act as a mediator or intercessor between Him and us. His love is a more than sufficient gurantee for our salvation. The Brahmo Samaj has removed all barriers between God and man. It has made the whole universe His temple ; every longing soul its own priest, rather, God Himself the High-priest of all. The new gospel of the Brahmo Samaj says that not in Jerusalem nor through the medium of priest or prophet shall man worship the Spirit-God ; the spirit draweth nigh unto Him wherever and whenever it would, without waiting for the intercession of any spiritual advocate, dead or alive.

No mediator or priest essential to worship.

God our High-priest.

The spiritual worship of the Braumo Samaj is not any outward ceremony. It does not necessarily require the uttering of any word of praise or prayer. The essence of worship is the yearning of the soul for God and its self-consecration to His service. Worship has been defined by Brahmo teachers "as the love of God and the doing of what is acceptable to Him"—

Worship consists in love and service.

तस्मिन्प्रीति तस्यप्रियकार्यसाधनम् ।

These are the two essential elements of worship प्रीति and प्रियकार्य love and service. Every act of

Work as worship

good done in love is worship. To feed the hungry, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, help the weak, uplift the fallen, right the wrong and check the oppressive is to serve the Lord. Work indeed is worship. But to be worship work must be prompted and inspired by genuine love. Otherwise, "though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burnt and have not love, it profiteth me nothing." Work can never be the substitute of worship. The two must go hand in hand. Work done for the love of God and unto His glory sanctifieth the soul, but dissociated from this end, it leads to vanity, barrenness, self-seeking.

Establishment of spiritual worship the supreme mission of the Brahmo Samaj.

The essence of worship is love and service, love which flows out in service and service which is inspired by love of God. Such is the simple but soul-satisfying conception of worship in the religion of the Brahmo Samaj. Here is an act of direct spiritual experience. Every man must approach his God and worship Him in the sanctuary of his soul. In worship he is to receive light and inspiration from God, in worship he may lay the burdens of his soul at the feet of God, in worship he can receive strength and peace and joy. It is an act of supreme reality. The chief mission of the Brahmo Samaj is to establish this pure spiritual worship of God in individual life, in domestic life, in social life. Religion, according to the Brahmo, begins in worship and finds its consummation in worship.

CHAPTER VI

Sin and Salvation

Conception of sin the distinguishing mark between religion and philosophy.

What is sin.

One crucial test marks off religion from philosophy is the conception of, and attitude towards sin. Brahmoism, while deprecating such sentiments as that "man is born in sin" or depraved by nature on account of the original sin of the parents nevertheless does not make light of the awful reality of sin. The Brahmo Samaj looks upon sin as the terrible fact of our everyday human existence. Sin is conscious violation of Divine Law. In His beneficent providence, God has given us the power of will, within certain restricted spheres, to choose between the lower and the higher course of action. He has given us the faculty to distinguish right from wrong, as He has given us faculties to distinguish red from black, the correct from the incorrect, or the beautiful from the ugly. To man belongs the precious privilege, which necessarily includes the terrible responsibility, of the power to choose between two alternatives where one of them is higher, worthier, than the other. If in the presence of the lower he voluntarily chooses the higher in scorn of consequences to his sentient nature, he does the right, he is in harmony with the moral law, he is approved of God. On the other hand, if in the presence of the higher he chooses the lower, if at the suggestion

of selfish gain or the solicitation of sordid passion he turns away from the highest ideal of his moral consciousness and voluntarily yields obedience to the lower, he violates the moral law, disregards the will of God, commits sin. Every act of such violation of the moral law dims the spiritual vision and alienates the soul from God. Apart from the evil consequences of wrong-doing in the visible world,—and it is an inevitable natural law, which even the atheist admits, that the wages of sin is suffering,—there overtakes the offender a still more terrible punishment in the spiritual world in the withholding of the light of God from the transgressing soul and in the smarting consciousness of having done that which was wrong. It is this inner pang and desolation that becomes the most awful consequence of sin, most dreaded by the healthy soul. Such a soul, not altogether blinded and blunted in wrong-doing, cries forth in the consciousness of its guilt, "Purge me, chastise me, burn me, if Thou likest : but, O God, do not withhold Thy light from me."

Sin a Reality The Brahmo Samaj solemnly acknowledging the terrible significance of sin, one of the most important consequences of the permeation of its principles has been an awakening of the consciousness of sin in the country. At the same time, the Brahmo Samaj emphatically repudiates the conception of eternal damnation. Awful and terrible beyond all description as are the nature and consequences of sin, the Brahmo believes that the love of God is

rightier still than the guilt of man. God's love can never forsake the sinner; it is blasphemy to say that God, who is Love, can consign His children, even the erring and rebellious ones, to everlasting hellfire. God's love will not, cannot, allow even one soul to be lost for ever. If sin is real, even more real is the love of God, tireless in the quest after His erring, wayward, straying children. If the sinner does not turn to God, God goes after him until he has been won back. God is for *saving* and not for *destroying* His children.

God's love
a more
powerful
reality.

Nor is there any necessity of a sacrifice in order to appease the anger of God for the simple reason that our God is not an angry God. The attitude of God towards the sinner is not that of anger but of pity. The evil effects of sin in the natural world not even God can undo. If in my fury I kill an innocent man, God does not bring him back to life; if in my lust I ruin a woman, my profession of faith in any saviour cannot redress or exculpate me. I must bear the consequence of my action and must render whatever reparation is still possible at any cost. There is no excuse, no escape, from receiving the wages of wrongdoing; on the other hand, no true man, much less the penitent soul, desires to avoid the unpleasant consequences of his action. There is forgiveness in the sense that I shall be saved from bearing the consequences of the evil that I have done to others by the violation of the laws of nature. But the sense of alienation from God,

Forgiveness
not appease-
ment of an
angry God,

but the restoration of the disturbed harmony between the individual soul and God.

the withholding of His light, can be removed. From his just punishment the true penitent does not wish to be freed; rather, he insists that his wrongdoing should have its due wages; but what he prays for is that he may be reconciled to his God, that he may not be cut off from His light. All that is necessary for this reconciliation of the sinner with God is sincere repentance. Until and until the sinner repents, no water here or in heaven, no blood, not even of the most immaculate person, can cleanse him, no sacrifice can propitiate God. The moment, however, the sinner repents with true repentance, there is nothing to stand between the penitent soul and the love of God. The loving, pitying Father, indeed, will be waiting for him, and the moment the sinner, like the prodigal son, says to himself, "I will arise and go to my father," the Father rejoices to receive him back. Forgiveness of God means this receiving back of the penitent sinner to light and communion.

Brahmo conception of salvation.

Such being the Brahmo conception of sin and forgiveness, let us see what is meant by salvation. As the Brahmo Samaj does not consider life itself an evil, rather, as it looks upon it as a gift from God, the old Hindu view of salvation as deliverance from the liability to birth has no place here. Nor do we consider salvation as a state of permanent happiness in a far-off heaven at some future date. Similarly the Christian conception of absolute freedom from original sin has no significance for us, as

not believe in any original sin due to the eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge by the first parents. Yet salvation has a real and definite meaning in Brahmo theology. Salvation is the perfect harmony of the human soul with the Divine will, the course of the progressive voluntary subordination of the individual will to the Supreme will. This is the *summum bonum* of spiritual life. We are conscious of, and familiar with different degrees of obedience and surrendered to the will of God. Our self-love, passions and appetites often prompt us to deeds which we feel to be wrong and unworthy. Hence there is a cleavage between the path of duty and that of pleasure, *Shreya* and *Preya*, that which we ought to do and that which we like. Progress in spiritual life means the gradual approximation of our likings and inclinations to the will of God. As we grow in spirituality, low desires, unworthy affections, evil thoughts, give place to pure aspirations, generous sentiments, noble thoughts and at last a stage is reached when base inclination becomes impossible ; the individual soul not only does not do what is unacceptable to God, but has no desire, no inclination, save that which is approved of God ; it beats in perfect unison with the rhythm of the Divine will. All discord vanishes at this height ; inclination and duty, *Preya* and *Shreya*, coalesce. This stage of perfect harmony between the human soul with the Divine soul, the coalescence of the individual will with the Eternal, the way of complete obedience and absolute surrender,

is what we understand by salvation. It was the beauty of the devotee which was indicated by Jesus when he said, "I and my Father are one"; the तत्त्वमसि of the Vedanta.

CHAPTER VII.

Incarnation and Mediation.

The Brahmo conceptions of God and worship are in direct antagonism with two familiar ideas which have figured most prominently in many of the historical religions, *viz.* the doctrines of incarnation and mediation. Many of the existing religions, while admitting the unity of the Godhead, have set up some beings, divine or semi-divine in their nature, to share in the divinity of God. The most well-known doctrine of this type is that of incarnation, which constitute the corner stone of *pauranic* Hinduism and of Christianity. Hinduism, while admitting the ultimate unity of God, says that He came into the world several times assuming various forms. The Christian doctrine of the deity of Christ is in its essence exactly of the same nature, claiming that Jesus was the God Eternal who incarnated Himself for the benefit of man. The genesis of this doctrine is to be found in an underlying suspicion that the Eternal God is so high and inaccessible to man that He must send down a duplicate of Himself in order that men may have the knowledge of Him. Others like the Moslems, have tried to solve the same difficulty, not, indeed, by duplicating God, but by postulating one or more semi-divine beings mediating between God and man.

The doctrine of incarnation in Hinduism and Christianity.

Its genesis: a supposed gulf between God and man.

The relic of
an antiqua-
ted theology.

In the Brahmo conception of God, there is no necessity or room for any such doctrines. God is the Soul of our souls; He is nearer than the nearest; in Him we live, move and have our being. Where, then, can there be any necessity for an intercessor or mediator between God and man? These doctrines are evidently the relics of a primitive, antiquated theology in which God figured as a mechanical artificer, an extra-cosmic deity; but with a God immanent in every atom, indwelling in every soul, there is no necessity for an external mediator or revealer. The older theologies have first created a gulf between God and man and then made themselves busy searching for a means of bridging over it.

The difficult-
ies of the
doctrine.

The very idea of the Eternal God embodying himself in flesh and blood and becoming subject to all the vicissitudes of finite existence is grotesque, if not unthinkable. The ludicrousness of the conception was felt by its originators themselves; several attempts were made by the early Christian Fathers to get over it, and hence the schools of Gnosticism. It was this same difficulty that made the pious Gospel-writer shrink from the admission of ordinary birth from human parents in the case of Christ and gave rise to the doctrine of conception by the Holy Ghost. The Indian theologians in their turn tried to obviate the same difficulty by making a distinction between the *Nirguna Brahma* and the *Saguna Brahma*, of whom the latter alone ever incarnated himself.

These explanations are as unsatisfying to the head as to the heart.

Then, again, if there were any need of an incarnation for the salvation of mankind, what about the vast millions of men born before the birth of Krishna or Christ and those even now passing away without any knowledge of the Incarnated God? If there ever was a necessity of God coming down to the earth in human shape that necessity exists and shall exist for ever and for every man. If it were impossible to know God or to believe in Him unless He were seen in flesh and blood, then to the vast majority of the human race who were not contemporaries of the incarnated God and did not see him in flesh and blood, faith would remain impossible, and if they should refuse to believe in God unless He came to them in visible shape, they would be justified by the conditions of God Himself.

If it is argued that there was a necessity of the incarnation of God, not for bridging over any gulf between God and man, nor for the sake of the revelation of the knowledge of God, but for that of an example for the human race, that plea is surely more plausible. There can be no doubt that a concrete example of holy life is much more efficacious than abstract teaching; but the efficacy of that example depends exactly on his being a man like ourselves and not God. If Jesus, for instance, were God, the suffering, temptation and triumph which constitute the crown of his life, were meaningless.

**Incarnation
as a perfect
exemplar for
humanity.**

**A more
plausible ex-
planation.**

Valid only if
the incarna-
tion is a man
and not God.

To God there can be no suffering and temptation. Moreover, the temptation and triumph of God can have no message for us, for the achievements of His Divine nature can be no index to our possibilities. The temptation in the wilderness, the agony at Gethsemane, the fortitude on Calvary, the final triumph at the critical moment, are grand only as experiences of a sublime but *human* nature, but grotesque, to say the least, as experiences of God.

The doctrine
of incarna-
tion mars the
beauty of
noble souls.

The faith which looks upon the great religious teachers and martyrs as God incarnated, admirable though it may be in its intent, absolutely misses the divine significance of these lives. The doctrine of incarnation is, on the one hand, derogatory to the conception of God; on the other, it strips of their meaning and beauty the noble lives that are identified with God. For as human beings they are sublime and beautiful; but as God their sufferings and sacrifices are of no value. It is easy to see that the doctrine under discussion had its birth in a morbid hero-worship. But it is reverence which unconsciously misses its own end. For the beauty of these lives depends on their being human natures similar to ours, starting from the same point, travelling along the same road, with the same or rather greater difficulties, dangers, trials and temptations, but in the end overcoming them all by steadfast faith and perfect surrender to the will of God.

Elements of
truth in the
doctrine.

And it is exactly in this light that the Brahmo Samaj looks upon the prophets and religious teach-

ers of the world. They were not God, nor indeed, mediators between God and man, because for such there is neither necessity nor room ;—but they were men like ourselves who by faith and love, loyalty and devotion, prayer and grace, attained to the knowledge of God on the summit of manhood and thus stand as great examples for us to imitate and emulate, inspiring us with hope in the hour of darkness and courage in the time of trial. We may go further and say that the appear and disappear as parts of a Providential design, each revealing some Divine purpose and leading mankind to certain truths, thereby helping in God's great work—the moral and spiritual education of mankind. In the providence of God, they supply a much needed spiritual stimulus and inspiration but are not any infallible standards of truth or doctrine. The Brahmo looks upon them not as Gods, nor as superhuman beings standing between God and man, but as elder brothers, to be loved, cherished and venerated, at the same time not giving to them the worship and the glory due to God, the Father of all, which indeed they themselves would be most shocked to see diverted to them. And in his love and veneration for teachers, saints, prophets, the Brahmo knows no distinction of caste, colour, creed, time or nationality, but looks with equal regard upon the religious teachers of all faiths, ages and countries—that is, in proportion to the intrinsic acceptability of their respective teachings.

**Brahmo view
of the great
religious
teachers of
the world.**

CHAPTER VIII.

Scripture and Revelation.

Truth the
scripture of
the Brahmo
Samaj.

One essential element of religion is supposed to be scripture. Hinduism has its Vedas, Mahomadanism its Quoran, Christianity its Bible. The followers of these religions draw their authority and sanction from their respective scriptures. It may be asked, what is the scripture of the Brahmo Samaj, on what is Brahmoism based? To this we reply that Truth is alone our eternal scripture, सत्यम् शास्त्रमनन्तरं. The religion of the Brahmo Samaj is not based on this or that book, so that with a doubt cast on its authority the very foundation gives way; its scripture is not a particular book written in a particular language amongst a particular people. Its scripture is the eternal and universal Truth, wherever found and by whomsoever taught.

God the
Source of all
Truth.

The question arises, how do we know truth, what is the source of the knowledge of truth? Every religion, it will be contended, accepts truth as binding; but how can truth be known except from some authoritative scripture? Our reply is, the Brahmo Samaj derives its revelation from the fountain source whence all sages and scriptures have drawn their inspiration. Whence did the Vedas and the Bibles receive their truth? God is the ultimate source of all truth and religi n.

Every religion professes to have received its revelation from God. And the Brahmo Samaj goes direct to that Fountain head whence the *rishis* and prophets, Jesus and Mahommad received the revelations recorded in the so-called scriptures.

But while revelation, according to their followers, is a particular historical incident, to the Brahmo it is a perennial process. It is not that God spoke on the top of Sinai, or on the bank of the Saraswati only, to a Jesus or a Mahommad alone, and ever since has been silent. Revelation is ever-present, ever-progressive. God speaks to all who seek Him in sincerity of heart and purity of mind. The most sacred shrine of God is in the soul of man. Reason and conscience and the spiritual sense are the channels through which He reveals Himself constantly to His children. Religion is not based on the external authority of any man or book; the eternal foundation of religion is the spiritual nature of man. Churches may decay, scriptures may become antiquated; but so long as man is man, there shall be religion. The eternal guarantee of faith is in man's natural hankering after God.

Revelation a
perennial
process.

The Brahmo Samaj, however, does not deny the inspiration of the scriptures of historical religion. It does not say that the Vedas, or the Bible, or the Quoran, or other scriptures do not contain God's revelation. Only it does not confine revelation to one particular book or nation, prophet or church; it avers that scripture is not the

Difficulties
of an infalli-
ble and ex-
clusive
scripture.

foundation of truth, but truth the test of scripture. Scripture does not make truth, but truth makes scripture. The older religions claim that their particular book is the only infallible exclusive, record of truth. Whatever is written in it is truth, and whatever is not sanctioned by it is untruth. This assumption has landed the religious world in insurmountable difficulties. In the first place, religion has been brought into conflict with science and the progressive knowledge of humanity. Many things found in the so-called scriptures and accepted as infallible revelations are now found to be untenable. In the second place, the professors of each religion claim their particular book to be the one 'Holy Writ' to the exclusion of other books and regard implicit faith in it as essential to salvation. Here is a veritable dilemma. If the seeker after truth can believe in one scripture, why should he not believe in another? The Bible has as much claim to be regarded as the Infallible Revelation as the Vedas or the Quoran or the scripture of any other religious body. Thus arises the modern conflict of the scriptures. And if the honest and unbiased inquirer is to come to a conclusion, he must at last fall back on his God-given faculties of reason, conscience and the spiritual sense, which thus become the ultimate witnesses to truth.

Conflict with
progressive
science.

Conflict of
scriptures.

The Brahmo
Samaj wel-
comes truth
from all
sources.

With truth as the final touchstone, the Brahmo Samaj looks with equal regard upon the scriptures of all religions, nations and ages as the accumu-

ted treasures of humanity. Whatever is truth, whether it comes from east or west, past or present, is sacred to the Brahmo. To him there does not exist any conflict of science with religion, of scripture with scripture. The marvellous progress of knowledge in modern times he welcomes with sincere joy and confidence. To him every addition to man's knowledge, in whatever field it may be, is so much light thrown upon God's ways, and it opens out a closer approach to His inner sanctuary. Similarly every scripture every book, sacred or secular, which is the fruit of man's quest after truth, is a ray of light from God, a fragment of the timeless, endless Revelation, a rhythm in the eternal Word, in the measure in which it proves helpful to him in his upward march towards perfection.

The scripture of the Brahmo Samaj is thus not confined within the boundary or in the history of one country ; it is not written in one language, but is to be found in the language and dialect of all races and nations. Wherever man has searched God, read His Divine purpose in nature and history listened to his message in the depths of the soul and tried to spell out the mysteries of his experience in tones of wonder and admiration, there is the scripture of the Brahmo. It is ancient and world-wide ; it is modern and progressive. The Brahmo Samaj has entered into the heritage of the spiritual legacy of all nations and ages. In its quest after truth, it knows no limitations of age, clime, colour, race,

The Scripture of the Brahmo.

nationality or language. The God of the Brahmo Samaj is universal, its Scripture is universal, Revelation is universal, ever-progressive, ever-present.

CHAPTER IX.

The Social Ideal of the Brahmo Samaj.

A noteworthy feature of the religion of the Brahmo Samaj in its social deal. It is not merely a religion of the closet to be believed in and cherished by the individual in private, but it is a faith which permeates and moulds his entire being, transforming his home, his surroundings, his social relations. Thus the Brahmo Samaj has developed a social ideal, which in a country like India, with its rigid system of caste distinctions, its seclusion of women, has come into sharp collision with the existing order of things and attracted prominent attention. A few words about the social ideal of the Brahmo Samaj will, therefore, be not out of place. That ideal follows directly and logically from the Brahmo conception of God and His relation to man. From One God the Father of all, follows necessarily one humanity without any distinction of caste, colour, or sex.

**Brahmoism
a social
religion.**

**Social re-
construction
an important
feature.**

If God is our Father, all human beings stand to us related as brethren. There can thus be no superiority or inferiority based on race, colour or caste. Behind all inequalities of talent, culture, wealth and position, there is the fundamental equality of men as the children of God. And any distinction of superiority or inferiority among men as men, inherent in their birth, is a sin before God, the Father of all. Every vestige of such opprobrious distinction in human society, is there-

**One God one
humanity.**

Fundamental equality of individuals and classes.

fore, absolutely interdicted by the Brahmo Samaj. It does not countenance any pretensions, in form or spirit, to inherent superiority, in individuals, communities or races. The social ideal of the Brahmo Samaj, is therefore, one of perfect equality and fraternity between man and man, class and class. The Brahmo Samaj does not recognise any superior born spiritual caste. All men have a spiritual nature and are capable of infinite development intellectually, morally and spiritually. If we find apparent inequalities among them as they are at present, that is largely due to generations and centuries of unequal advantages and unjust laws. Perpetuation of, and even connivance at, such inequalities and injustices the Brahmo Samaj looks upon as sinful. To the Brahmo every human being, be he a Pariah or a Brahmin, be he a Mahomadan or a Hindu, be he a Negro with dark skin or a European of the purest white, is a brother. So long as we do not look upon and treat all men as our brethren, we have no right to call God our 'Father'.

Necessity of emphasis on the social equality of men.

The Brahmo Samaj has found it supremely necessary to insist upon this principle of the equality and fraternity of men, because in India the caste feeling has been specially strong and grossly unjust. Here society has been honey-combed with innumerable distinctions of caste, sub-caste, sect, sub-sect and so on, among whom the most ordinary amenities of life are forbidden. The sense of human kinship has been rendered well-nigh impossible in the midst of these innumerable artificial and unnatural distinctions. It is, there-

fore, of the utmost importance that the divine principle of the brotherhood of humanity should be sacredly cherished and guarded in the Church Universal.

Some apologists have tried to defend Indian caste on the plea that there must always remain differences between man and man, that even in European societies there are distinctions of classes. It is not denied that there will remain inequalities between man and man, but these inequalities must not be stereotyped and made the foundations of ultimate and insuperable barriers against mutual fellowship. If there are class distinctions and prejudices in European society, they are to be deplored and not glorified. The European classes, for one thing, are not permanent and insurmountable social barriers. They are not based on birth so much as on merit and culture. The evil of the Indian caste system is that it permanently prints the stamp of ignominy on the individual at his birth; it leaves no room or scope for individual merit and effort. The European classes are not hereditary disqualifications against individual distinction and elevation in social rank. In spite of all social prejudices, it is still left open to an individual to make his way to the highest rung of the social ladder. And, in fact, it has been possible for hundreds of men and women born in the lowest ranks of society to work their way to the highest places of honour and recognition. Indian caste, on the other hand, is a systematic, hereditary fixture of social inequalities and disabilities, which

Difference between class distinctions and caste.

Class distinctions based on worth and culture and movable.

Caste a hereditary and inseparable barrier.

unlawfully and, worst of all, in the name of religion denies the elementary rights of man to the millions of God's children and renders any crossing of the boundary-line utterly impossible. Against these unjust, unnatural, hereditary ignominies, disabilities and barriers, which are a curse to society and an abomination in the eye of God, the Brahmo Samaj has declared and must wage an uncompromising war.

A message of deliverance for the depressed classes.

It is this ideal of social equality that has aroused the keenest opposition against the Brahmo Samaj. The chief cause of the wrath of orthodox Hinduism against the Brahmo Samaj is its uncompromising war against the caste system. If the Brahmo Samaj would say nothing against caste distinctions, Hindu society might perhaps tolerate its monotheistic theology and worship. But the Brahmo Samaj has rightly made the abolition of caste one of its fundamental principles. In spite of the great offence to orthodoxy caused by it and the tremendous opposition of the many vested interests and rooted prejudice aroused by it, the Brahmo Samaj has boldly declared, and steadfastly adhered to, the principle of the brotherhood of humanity. The uplifting of the so-called low castes of India has been one of its chief glories. It goes to the down-trodden millions who have been for centuries despised and trampled upon by the higher classes and denied the most elementary social privileges, including the light of knowledge, and whose very touch has come to be pollution, and offers them the right

and of fellowship. It brings a message of deliverance—a veritable gospel—to the depressed, down-trodden millions of India after centuries of cruelty and pitiful degradation.

The same ideal of quality has been applied by the Brahmo Samaj to womankind with consequences of even greater importance. Whatever might have been the position of women—and there are unmistakable indications of its having been pretty high—in the early days of Hindu civilisation, they, during the last many centuries, have had to lead an existence of the utmost hardship and degradation in India. They had no education, they have been considered eligible for no religious culture except that of obeying their husbands. For ages they have been shut up in the seclusion of the screen and denied even the light of the heavens and fresh air. Spiritually, intellectually and even physically the existence of women in India has been marked by subjection to shameful wrong and woeful misery. In a way they have been supposed to live merely for the pleasure and advantage of men. It is difficult to repress indignation when one reads the descriptions of the nature of woman even in such avowedly religious books as the Mahabharata. In many places they are described as the vilest of creatures, utterly sensual and beyond correction, and to be kept out of mischief only under the surveillance of male relations, father, husband or son.

Degraded
constitution
of women in
the middle
ages in India.

The Brahmo Samaj with its spiritual conception of human nature declared, early in its history, the

Elevation of
women by

the Brahmo
samaj.

equal rights of men and women, and steadily carried out that ideal of equality in every detail of social life. One by one it has rooted out all degrading and unjust institutions and customs which pressed hard upon women, removed the disabilities under which they had to live and opened to them the gates of knowledge, social liberty, religious culture. It has torn up the *purdah*, taken out women confined in darkness into the air and light of the heavens and, extending to them the benefits of education and blessings of religion, it makes them share in all the rights and privileges of social life. This is another of the reforms for which the Brahmo Samaj has had to encounter great opposition and incur much displeasure and unpopularity. It has been called, more in derision than in commendation, the female emancipation movement. There can be no doubt that it has wrought a real "emancipation". With reference to this, one might truly say, "those who sat in darkness saw light, the fetters of ages were removed."

Similarly in every possible domestic and social concern the Brahmo Samaj has been solemnly and steadfastly endeavouring to apply the principles of justice and righteousness. It seeks to establish the kingdom of God in the heart and home of the ordinary men and women. Its religion is not for the chosen few nor for the quiet of the hermitage. The Brahmo Samaj would, under the providence of God, reconstruct society on the foundation of justice, righteousness and love.

CHAPTER X.

The Brahmo Samaj at Work.

In the foregoing chapters we have tried to set forth the fundamental principle of the Brahmo Samaj. The ideas are not perhaps altogether new. But the strict and uncompromising manner in which the Brahmo Samaj has applied them to life marks a novel and exceedingly interesting experiment, not only in India but in the religious history of the world; and if it succeeds in its mission, it will have solved a world-problem. A universal religion without any exclusive infallible scripture or infallible prophet has been well-nigh considered an impossibility. It has been the dream of seers and poets and the cherished ideal of schools of philosophy; but as a practical, soul-satisfying religion for ordinary men and women, it has been scouted by the wise and the devout alike. Indeed, there is much in the religious history of the world to justify this scepticism. Again and again in the religious history of the world, we find instances of a religion pure and perfect as it emerged from the mountain-head, like the crystal water of a mountain spring, but anon sullied foul with all sorts of sectarian, clannish, tribal prejudices, superstitions and narrownesses in the hands of its followers. In India, especially, the fate of pure spiritual,

The unique experiment of the Brahmo Samaj.

The obstacles in its way.

universal religion has been disastrous and its prospect gloomy. Idolatry, infallible scripture, infallible *guru* and caste have come to be believed to be the essentials of religion, at least since the post-Buddhistic age. The greatest theologians, most rationalistic philosophers and devoutest saints have yielded before these great national evils. It looks a presumptuous effort, indeed, on the part of the Brahmo Samaj to hope to establish the pure spiritual worship of One True God, the Father of all, in a land where the name of the gods is legion and society is honeycombed into innumerable castes, sub-castes, sects and sub-sects. The Brahmo Samaj, however, has steadily set its face against all obstacles and has stood firmly by its fundamental principle of One God, one humanity. In the face of the many plausible arguments defending or condoning idol worship the Brahmo Samaj has sternly forsworn this pernicious practice. Every vestige of, or association with, idolatry has been repudiated by the Brahmo Samaj. The Brahmo must thoroughly eradicate it from his individual life, his home and his social dealings. From birth to death he must worship the One Infinite God in spirit and in truth and Him alone he must serve. Under the auspices of the Brahmo Samaj, the principle and practice of the spiritual worship of the Spirit-God have become quite popular in the country at large, where already there are hundreds of congregations for the worship of one True God. And the spiritual potency of such worship has

The steadfast and uncompromising efforts of the Brahmo Samaj.

Its successes.

Numerous Theistic Congregations.

been illustrated in such lives as those of the late Maharshi Debendranath Tagore, Keshub Chandra Sen, Ananda Mohun Bose and others.

Equally strenuous and unsophisticated has been the attitude of the Brahmo Samaj against caste distinctions. The Brahmo Samaj has recognised no distinctions of colour, race, caste or nationality. Within the fold of the Brahmo Samaj, there may be, and are, men of all castes from the highest Brahmin to the lowest Sudra. The Brahmo Samaj has united all the races of India. A representative Brahmo assembly is a unique sight, bringing together all the races and creeds, Hindus, Mahomedans, Christians, Jews, Bengalis, Mahrattas, Telugus, Tamils, Canarese, Malayalis, Punjabis, Biharis, Uriyas and Assamese in one fraternal fellowship. In the Brahmo Samaj, not only have inter-marriages among the various castes and sub-castes become common but there have been many inter-provincial and inter-racial marriages as well. In the Brahmo Samaj, there is no "high" or "low," all are equally the children of God.

The Brahmo Samaj has likewise done away with all the religious and social inequalities and disabilities to which women have been subjected in almost all countries and specially in India. The Brahmo Samaj has given the fullest and freest liberty to women to develop their intellectual, moral and spiritual life. It invites and encourages women to share all the rights and privileges of the higher life equally with men. It does not reserve any blessing of life as the monopoly of men, nor im-

A considerable Theistic community recognising no distinction of caste or colour.

Intellectual and spiritual progress of women.

Practical Social Reform.

pose any law or ordinance on women which would not insist on in the case of men as well. Brahmo ladies have distinguished themselves in university examinations, in literature, in the arts and in useful professions. They enjoy equal rights with men in church government and they have acquitted themselves creditably as religious ministers and preachers. In the duties and obligations of matrimonial life, the Brahmo Samaj assigns the same place to men as to women. It has abolished child marriage and given perfect liberty to widows to remarry if they like. Marriage, in the Brahmo Samaj, is a solemn, sacred ordinance in which men and women who have attained the age of discretion can alone participate out of their own unfeathered free choice.

Wide influence of the Brahmo Samaj.

Thus the Brahmo Samaj seeks to form a religious community on the broadest and surest foundation of love and righteousness. During the few decades of its existence, it has succeeded in forming the nucleus of such a community in every province of India. Among the educated classes there are thousands who theoretically approve and accept the religious and social ideals of the Samaj. But the strict and uncompromising demands practically to eschew idolatry, caste and the other superstitions and evil practices of current Hinduism has proved too great an ordeal for many. The Brahmo Samaj, like every reforming religion, has incurred the displeasure of current orthodoxes. The acceptance of the religion of the Brahmo Samaj is inevitably followed by social persecutions.

The hostility of orthodoxy

and ostracism and means the snapping of many sweet and sacred ties of natural relationship. It is, therefore, only the strongest and bravest men inspired by a sacred responsibility to truth and supported by a profound faith in God that can successfully face the ordeal. The almost impregnable stronghold of the Indian caste system and the perfection of priestly organisation under it have made work of the Brahmo Samaj extremely difficult. Yet the progress already made is by no means disappointing. The Brahmo Samaj has found a sure foothold in every important race of Hindustan. It has received very cordial and respectful appreciation in Europe and America. It has created a rich and growing religious and devotional literature in all the principal vernaculars of India. And finally it has penetrated and permeated, coloured and tinged, the thought and life of the entire educated community. The ultimate triumph of the religion of the Brahmo Samaj is, under God, only a question of time.

and social
persecution.

Hopeful pro-
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